

## Bethesda Downtown Plan

The Bethesda area has been under review for rezoning for the last year and a half. The draft of the Plan and its recommendations has been made public and the Planning Board hearing on the Plan will be held on June 24<sup>th</sup>. Based on the new CR zones created when the Zoning Code was revised, and considering the current 'Smart Growth' philosophy, the plan recommendations contain few surprises. Heights in the core area will increase and density will increase by 20%. Our neighbors in Chevy Chase West, the Town of Chevy Chase and in East Bethesda are carefully looking at the treatment of height and use at the edges of the Sector Plan area. In many cases the plan calls for heights of 70' directly across from single family homes.

Several matters ought to be of concern to the Village:

- The usual and repeating concern about the effect of increased density on traffic and school overcrowding. The plan pays lip service to addressing these problems but is short on solutions. For example on the school issue it states: "Assure that there are options for providing adequate capacity." As for traffic the Plan calls for increased pedestrian, bike and BRT options.
- The increase of height to 70' adjacent to single family neighborhoods portends future problems for the Village when (years from now) the Friendship Heights Sector is revised and the Saks property is rezoned.
- The rezoning of the Bethesda Fire station at Wisconsin Ave south of Bradley Blvd. Currently zoned R-10 (residential low rise multi-family, garden apt type development) it now houses the Volunteer Fire Station. The plan proposes to rezone it to a 70' height with a change in density and use to a 1.5 Floor Area Ratio (FAR) which could be all commercial (office or retail), all residential, or a combination of both not to exceed 1.5 FAR. This is a huge and troubling change.

The County typically updates Sector Plans on a 20-year cycle, so the decisions made at this time will have a long-term effect on the downtown core and its neighboring communities. I recommend that the Village submit a letter for the public record addressing each of these issues with special emphasis on the Fire Station rezoning—including concerns over fire safety and commercial incursions south of Bradley—creep that the Village has consistently opposed over many decades.

Attached is a draft letter from the Board. Copies of the Planning Staff's draft 150-page plan are available by request from the Village office and online at [http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/bethesda\\_downtown/index.shtm](http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/bethesda_downtown/index.shtm).

Ultimately, the County Council will take final action to approve the Sector Plan, currently anticipated in spring of 2016.

*Patricia S. Baptiste*  
Grafton Street  
6/3/2015

Casey Anderson, Chair  
Montgomery County Planning Board  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland, 20910  
Re: Bethesda Sector Plan

Dear Chairman Anderson:

I am writing on behalf of the residents of Chevy Chase Village, an incorporated area directly south and east of the Bethesda Sector Plan area. We have reviewed the draft plan and offer the following comments and concerns:

- Our community continues to have grave concerns on the effect of development on both traffic and schools. Already congested roads, especially Wisconsin Ave and Connecticut Avenue, Bradley Lane and East-West Hwy are currently at or beyond capacity. Increased development in Bethesda will exacerbate this unacceptable situation. Similarly, the schools in our area are now at or over capacity (Somerset, Chevy Chase and Rosemary Hills). Increases in housing, while otherwise desirable, will result in added overcrowding –particularly when combined with the Chevy Chase Lake and Westbard areas sending children to these same schools. The Plan fails to adequately address either of these problems.
- We join with our neighbors in opposing heights as high as 70' directly across from single family residences. These heights are inconsistent with the plan's claim to "preserve and protect existing single-family neighborhoods in and around the Sector Plan." Heights should be lowered to 45' and uses strictly limited to residential.
- The Bethesda Fire Station property should retain its current R-10 zone or a similar zone which would provide for a fire station without increasing the height or other non-residential uses. The incursion of commercial uses south of Bradley Blvd should be prohibited. The Bethesda Master Plan calls for a 'green mile' between Bethesda and Friendship Heights and the Sector Plan should respect that provision.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Denger  
Chair, Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers

MLD:psb